

Thank you so much for giving us this wonderful day with you. God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:25 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. John A. Cherry, pastor of the church, and his wife, Rev. Diana P. Cherry.

Remarks on Signing the Social Security Independence and Program Improvements Act of 1994

August 15, 1994

Thank you very much. Thank you, Senator Moynihan, Chairman Gibbons, Secretary Shalala. To all the distinguished Members of Congress who are here, especially Senators Mitchell and Dole and the Speaker and to one who is not here, Andy Jacobs, who worked so hard on this endeavor, let me thank you all. Let me especially thank Senator Moynihan, who identified the need to reestablish the Social Security Administration as an independent agency 11 years ago. I was sitting here thinking, when I saw him up here so full of pride that this day had finally come to pass, of two things. First of all, about 8 months ago, Senator Moynihan said to me, "We have a lot of important business to do this year. And we'll have to fight like crazy on all of it. But if you will just come out and say you're for an independent Social Security agency, I think we can do this unanimously. And that would be a very good thing for Congress to do." [Laughter] And then I was wondering whether, if we waited 11 years we could be unanimous about every issue that comes before us. [Laughter] I want to thank Senator Moynihan for his persistence and guidance and all the others who have worked so hard on this legislation.

When Franklin Roosevelt made a speech to the New York legislature in 1931, he said this: "The success or failure of any government must be measured by the well-being of its citizens." That was the goal that moved him 59 years ago yesterday. On that day, in a ceremony in the Cabinet Room, just behind us, he signed the Social Security Act into law. And that is what guides us today.

With an independent Social Security Administration, we are reinventing our Government to streamline our operations so that we

can serve the American people better. We are strengthening those things which Social Security ought to do and taking precautions to make sure it does not do things which it ought not to do. It is proving that Government can still work to improve people's lives. And now Social Security, we know, will work even better.

For millions of Americans, that signature 59 years ago transformed old age from a time of fear and want to a period of rest and reward. It empowered many American families as well, freeing them to put their children through college to enrich their own lives, knowing that their parents would not grow old in poverty. Nine years ago, thanks to that effort, for the first time in the history of the United States, the elderly had a lower poverty rate than the rest of the population.

In fighting for Social Security and for so much else, President Roosevelt knew that the American people always would have a personal stake in overcoming the status quo when the need was great enough. That is something we should all remember as we go into the next few weeks, as we delay the August recess, as we struggle to come to grips with the challenges of this age, the challenge of crime, the challenge of health care.

These kinds of changes are difficult, but they always have been. In 1935, even Social Security as we know it nearly died in a congressional committee, as Senators considered stripping away the old-age pension. Congress almost left town with this and other critical work unfinished. But they found the grit to work on through the summer of 1935, when they didn't have as much air-conditioning as we have today. And they accomplished so much in that period now known as the Second Hundred Days. President Roosevelt said then that that session of Congress would be regarded as historic for all time.

What we do here today maintains that historic commitment. If we keep focus on the work we are sent here to do, what we do here today can be but the precursor of things that we also can do to benefit the American people that will be historic for all time.

Now I'd like to ask the folks here to join me as I sign this bill. In the beginning, I will for a letter or two at least, use the pen

that President Roosevelt used 59 years ago yesterday.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:40 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. H.R. 4277, approved August 15, was assigned Public Law No. 103-296.

Statement on Signing the Social Security Independence and Program Improvements Act of 1994

August 15, 1994

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 4277, the "Social Security Independence and Program Improvements Act of 1994." Fifty-nine years ago, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the original Social Security Act, creating one of the most important and successful Government programs of all times. With the enactment of H.R. 4277, we are beginning a new chapter in the history of the Social Security program, one which recognizes the program's importance by elevating the stature of the agency responsible for its administration. Once combined with a genuine reform of our health care system, we will have fulfilled the vision of the original architects of the Social Security system to provide Americans protection against the vicissitudes of old age and ill health.

Establishing the Social Security Administration as an independent agency within the executive branch reflects my commitment to maintain the confidence of all Americans in the Social Security program. I sincerely hope that it will reassure those currently paying into the system that they too will receive benefits when they retire. For nearly 60 years, the Social Security Administration has done an admirable job of carrying out its principal mandate: ensuring that Americans receive the Social Security benefits to which they are entitled. The agency's new status recognizes and strengthens our commitment to this tradition of public service.

As I have stated many times, my Administration is committed to "putting people first." Consistent with this philosophy, I issued Executive Order 12862 directing public officials to "embark upon a revolution within the Federal Government . . . to provide service

to the public that matches or exceeds the best service available in the private sector." Establishing an independent Social Security Administration will enhance its ability to meet this goal and provide "world class service" to all Americans.

I also want to highlight that H.R. 4277 includes important provisions designed to strengthen the integrity of the disability programs administered by the Social Security Administration. For example, recipients disabled due to substance abuse will now only receive benefits for a limited time (generally 36 months). These recipients must also undergo appropriate, available treatment.

Finally, I must note that, in the opinion of the Department of Justice, the provision that the President can remove the single Commissioner only for neglect of duty or malfeasance in office raises a significant constitutional question. I am prepared to work with the Congress on a corrective amendment that would resolve this constitutional question so as to eliminate the risk of litigation.

Again, I am pleased to approve H.R. 4277 and to reaffirm my commitment to carrying out the Social Security program for the benefit of our Nation's citizens.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
August 15, 1994.

Remarks on Crime Legislation

August 15, 1994

Thank you. Thank you very much, Marc, Janice, Steve, and Dewey, and to all the rest of you who are here. We have just heard from the real American interests in the crime bill.

Last week, the House of Representatives walked away from Polly Klaas and Jody Sposato and James Darby and all the law enforcement officials in this country who have worked so very hard for this crime bill. When you walk away from our police officers and from our kids, from our hard-working citizens with their futures before them or our senior citizens who have given their lives to make this a better country, and you do it on a procedural trick so you can still go back home and pretend that you didn't vote